137 On such soil and in such a climate, vegetation is reduced to some sparse, stunted trees, some angular bushes where thorny plants predominate. Upon the arrival of the rains, the land becomes covered in an incredibly short time with flowers and tall grasses. But during the other seven months, these plants wither and dry up (when the brush fires of the Indians do not do away with them completely) and the sand, white, red or ocher according to the region, appears in large
136 tracts under the charred branches. This is the time when the rare
137 small game which wanders across the plateau concentrates in the impenetrable groves (capões) whose rounded dome marks the presence of springs. There the animals find small pastures still green, usually bordering the narrow ribbon of forest which borders the rivers.

133 The courses of water are numerous and important, the two principal groups forming respectively the basins of the Juruena and of the Roosevelt. All the valleys are approximately parallel, and their waters flow toward the north. They cut the plateau by as many longitudinal ditches, and their course is cut up by cascades of rapids, sometimes also by waterfalls—for example, the falls of the Papagaio River at Utiarity, the falls of the Sacre River, and the rapids of the Juruena. These accidents correspond to the passage from sedimentary soil to crystalline rocks which reappear in the middle part of the Amazon basin. In their upper courses, owing to the nature of the terrain, the rivers have deep beds sometimes reaching a depth of some thirty meters. The water remains so transparent, however, that one can easily see the bottom and the fish which swim around. These conditions aggravate the food problem even more. The fish sees the fisherman through the crystal green and escapes him without fail. This is true especially concerning the branches of the Tapajoz. When one reaches the lowlands of the valley of the Madeira, one does not only go from prairie to humid forest, the water courses [6] are also transformed, with the beds flat and muddy, and the waters a reddish color.

101 One can see that the frontiers of the territory occupied by the
131 Nambikwara correspond—roughly in the south and north, and almost exactly in the northwest—to the limits of the plateau. Toward the east, where the border follows closely the course of the Juruena, the Nambikwara border the Paressi and the Iranxe Indians who occupy the southern and eastern parts of the plateau.

● 161 It is impossible to estimate even approximately, the number of Nambikwara population since their territory remains to a large extent unknown. But it seems reasonable to assume that at the end of the construction of the telegraph line (around 1915-1920) this number must have been about five times more than at present. In postulating

a density of constant population for the whole territory, one might admit a total figure of 10,000 inhabitants at the time of discovery, corresponding to 2,000 or 3,000 today, and probably even less. Our itinerary had been drawn up with the main purpose of putting us in contact with the greatest possible number of Indians. After five months of traveling across their territory, we had only encountered 200; that was the actual mean of a single Nambikwara band twenty years ago. Today the nomad band consists of from 4 or 5 to 30 or 40 members. This demographic decrease is explained by the introduction of diseases of other races after the first penetration of the territory in 1907. The few numerical data which it was possible for us to collect will dispense with all commentary. Fifteen years ago, the known fraction of the Sabané group numbered more than 1,000 individuals; when the group visited the telegraph station of Campos Novos in 1928, there were counted 127 men plus women and children. In November of 1928 however, an epidemic of grippe broke out, when the group was camping at a place known to the telegraph employees by the name of Espirro. The illness rapidly evolved toward a form of pulmonary oedema, and 300 Indians died in 48 hours. The whole group disbanded, fleeing the malady and leaving behind the sick and dying. Of the 1,000 Sabané formerly known, only 19 men survived along with their wives and children. Besides the epidemic it should be added, to explain these astounding figures, that the Sabané were at war several years ago with certain eastern neighbors (group a2) (1).

1. See the classification of the Nambikwara group, below, p. 10 f.

But a large group of dialect b2, installed not far from Tres Buritis, was completely liquidated by the grippe in 1927 except six or seven persons of whom only (2) three were still living in 1938. The Tarundé

2. See below, p. 51.

group, [7] formerly one of the most important, still had 12 men (besides women and children) in 1926; of these 12 men, 4 only were living in 1939.

A southern group of dialect b1 (Kabişi) seems to have resisted better; undoubtedly because their contacts with the people of the Line are rare. From 1929 to 1934, no Kabişi had been seen along the telegraph line. The Indians perhaps circulated more to the south

101 where the town of Villa Bella de Mato Grosso, three quarters abandoned,
161 must have undergone several attacks by unknown Indians, during the same period, but whom the rare residents also call by the name of Kabişi. According to our informants, this group in itself still had 700 or 800 individuals of whom we encountered a dozen in September 1938 (1). The other groups decreased rapidly, by epidemics, and

[163] 1. See below, p. 52.

owing to their feeble birth rate which constitutes a general phenomenon as will be seen in the chapter dedicated to the analysis of each group.

* * *

114 All by himself, Roquette Pinto has attempted a classification of
101 the Nambikwara. He distinguishes four groups. To the southeast,
197 the Kokozu, who live near the Juruena, Juina, Papagaio and Camararé Rivers; to the northeast, the Anunzé, who occupy the basin of the Doze de Otubro River; to the southwest, a group called Uainsçu or Kabixi, extending from Campos Novos to the valley of the Guaporé. Finally, to the northwest, from the west bank of the Doze de Otubro River to the valley of the Roosevelt River, is found a final group consisting of the Tagnani, Tauité, Saluma, Taruté, Taschuité. Roquette Pinto does not clearly indicate on what basis this classification is founded. One can assume that it is not purely linguistic, since the vocabularies published in Rondonia contain only three dialects. Without doubt, a good deal of empiricism is involved. Besides, the list of groups which is found in the publications of Rondon and his collaborators only occasionally corresponds to the classification of Roquette Pinto. Our own lists of names of groups do not include all those cited by our precursors; but they reveal several new names. At the same time, we have brought up some dialects which had never been mentioned. It is thus too early to proceed to a definitive classification, and farther on will be found the reasons for these uncertainties. The nomad bands of the Nambikwara are of fragile formation, and they all possess a name, a surname derived from the system of parentage or owed to the malice of a neighboring group. Thus the names appear, disappear, or are transmitted with surprising facility. Here is a good example of disagreement [8] between observers working in different periods: Somewhere, between 1926 and 1928, Max Schmidt collected a short vocabulary of 20 words, which he published later on (1) as having been obtained from a group called

1. loc. cit.

[36] Eastern group, dialect a1: oakletosu (a1); galiere (b1); galiririte (c).

621 [161] This group, comprising 23 persons divided into six families, was found in the region of the Papagaio River (Utiarity) upon the occasion of one of its excursions in the nomad period. As we learned later, it was part of quite an important Indian community localized in several villages or camp sites in an unexplored zone of the right bank of the Juruena River, where we went, traveled and lived with them. The dry season and the period of nomadism does not seem to have been the only reason for the isolation of the group; some differences re- [622] lating to command had seemingly provoked a break, grouping a certain number of individuals around an active and ambitious chief. We have, undoubtedly, been called on to play a semi-conscious role in this fight. We shall return to this point when we treat of command. However, the encounters of the group with other bands belonging to the same community have always been cordial. The meeting with a first band approximately restored the population of the winter vil- [161] lage; and the strength of a neighboring village, found later on, increased the number to 75 persons, the largest number of Indians that we saw united in eight months.

As will be seen by the geneological chart opposite, the restricted group is composed of four generations, the oldest reduced to two individuals, the following being composed of "husbands" and "wives," "brothers," "sisters," "brothers-in-law" and "sisters-in-law." The third and the fourth, finally, constitute a complex mixture of children, sometimes at an early age, considered as "children" or "relatives," and of adults claimed as "brothers," "sisters," "husbands," and "wives," and shifted to a generation younger than their normal one because of their situation as children of older brothers.

Before giving several quick pieces of information about each of the members of the group from the point of view of his situation in the kinship system and of his individual psychology, it is necessary to stop for a moment at the question of proper names.

• • • •

551 Proper names are never pronounced among the Nambikwara. A very strict prohibition forbids them and raises a nearly insoluble problem for the notation of genealogies, even though the taboo does not seem to be as rigorous for the dead as for the living. Nevertheless, one [37] never hears a proper name, and individuals call one another

2: Lévi-Strauss E-5 (1938-1939)1948
SP17 Nambicuara SP17

Nambicuara (Roquette-Pinto's *Uaintaçu*, which includes his *Kabishi*, *Tawandé*, *Tawaté*, *Tamaé*, and *Tachaitê*) between the Camaré River Basin in the south and the Tenente Marqués, Iké and Roosevelt Rivers in the north and northwest; *Western Nambicuara* (new), closely related to the central and southern groups and living on the headwaters and in the upper basin of the Roosevelt River; and *Northern Nambicuara* (new), speaking its own language and living north of the central group.

The Indians mention other tribes north of the *Nambicuara;* one called *Salumã, Sarumã,* or *Solondé* is almost certainly the *Mundurucú;* another may be the *Tapanyuna.*

In 1907, Rondón estimated the total *Nambicuara* population to be 20,000. In 1912 Roquette-Pinto met 1,000 to 1,500. It is doubtful whether the total population, which has been decimated by several recent epidemics, now greatly exceeds 1,500.

The *Nambicuara* language was previously thought to be isolated, but its distinctive trait—the use of classificatory suffixes dividing the universe into about ten categories—is strongly reminiscent of *Chibcha.*

Nambicuara culture, although less primitive than that of the *Siriono* to the southwest, is strikingly simple in comparison with that of the neighboring *Paressi* to the southeast and of the *Tupi-Cawahib* to the northwest. Their lack of the hammock, their custom of sleeping on the ground, their crude ceramics (the *Eastern Nambicuara* entirely lack pottery), the nakedness of both sexes, their nomadism, their use of temporary shelters during most of the year, the general poverty of their material culture, and the simplicity of their social organization distinguish them from the higher cultures of the Guaporé River area, to which they nevertheless probably belong.

CULTURE

SUBSISTENCE

The *Nambicuara* habitat is a savannalike plateau about 500 to 1,500 feet (150 to 500 m.) above sea level with an arenaceous soil which comes from disintegrated sandstone bedrock. Except for narrow gallery forests along river banks, the region is infertile, having only shrubs and small trees with thorns or thick bark.

In this unproductive environment the *Nambicuara* have a dual subsistence pattern. They are both seminomadic bush dwellers and incipient farmers. During the dry season, women, accompanied by their children, forage with digging sticks for wild fruits, seeds, and roots, and catch grubs, rats, bats, spiders, snakes, lizards, and other small creatures, while men hunt what large game they can find with bows and arrows and collect wild honey.

3: Lévi-Strauss E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
SP17 Nambicuara SP17

Gardening exists only during the rainy season and does not free the Nambikuara from wandering during the seven months of the dry season, looking for wild roots, fruits and seeds, small animals such as lizards, snakes, bats, spiders and grasshoppers and, generally speaking, anything which may prevent them from starving. As a matter of fact, their geographical surroundings, which are located in the northwestern part of the state of Mato Grosso and include the headwaters of the Tapajos, Rio Roosevelt and Rio Gi-Parana, consist of a desolated savanna with few vegetal resources and still less game.

Had I approached my subject from a point of view other than the one outlined above, I could not have avoided a long discussion in South American cultural history, aimed at clearing up this apparent primitiveness, on the question as to whether the survival of early conditions of life in South America is genuine or whether we should consider it as a more recent—although undoubtedly pre-columbian—result of culture clashes and processes of acculturation. Whatever the answer may be, it cannot substantially change our problem: whether tarriant or recessive, the Nambikuara society functions, in the present, as one of the simplest forms of human society to be conceived. We shall not seek information from the particular history which kept them in their exceptionally crude organization or brought them back to it. We shall only look at the experiment in social anthropology which they now enact under our very eyes.

This holds especially true in respect to their social and political life. For if we do not know what was the material culture of the Nambikuara forty years ago (they were discovered only in 1907), we do know that their numbers became tremendously reduced after their contact with white civilization. General (then Colonel) Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon, who discovered and studied them, first stated that their number was about 20,000. This was around 1915. I take this figure as greatly exaggerated, but even if reduced by one half, it considerably exceeds the present number which is hardly more than 2,000. Epidemics have taken care of the difference. What does this mean, from the point of view of our study? During the dry season, the Nambikuara live in nomadic bands, each one under the leadership of a chief, who, during the sedentary life of the rainy months, may be either a village chief or a person of position. General Rondon wrote that, at the time he was exploring the country, it was not rare to see bands averaging two or three hundred individuals. Now, sixty or seventy

621 security and marital possibilities are endangered it will unite with some other band.

●161 According to the missionaries who live in the area, the number of individuals in each band of the [illegible] are as follows: Wakítisu, 18; Kitánhlu, 45, Elótasu, 17; Chiwáisu, 50. Old census figures give the population of the Western Nambicuara as 500, but the missionaries assured me that they doubted whether even half [164] as many exist today. It must be remembered that an epidemic of measles or "grippe" can diminish the population very rapidly. Syphilis and tuberculosis also exist among them. Judging from the physical appearance of the individuals and their general attitude toward life, it appears that the Eastern Nambicuara, at least, are dying out rapidly.

114 According to Roquette-Pinto, perhaps the earliest visitor to the territory now occupied by the Nambicuara was Antonio Pires do Campo, who went north up the Sepotuba River, which he called Hisipotuba, between 1718 and 1723, and in all likelihood reached the headwaters of the Sacre and Papagaio Rivers. In his Breve Noticia published in 1746, he mentions the Caviro Indians living in the valleys of the rivers running northward into the Amazon River.

Some years later Padre Ayres de Casal mentions a tribe living on the Juruena River, a territory long occupied by the Nambicuara. From 1800 on, rumors about the Indians living in this area increased. In 1862, Dr. Amedée Moure published a monograph on the Indians of Mato Grosso in which he devoted a chapter to the 10 savage, man-eating tribes, among whom he listed the Umotina, Cabixí, Nambicuara, and the Tapanuma (Roquette-Pinto, 1938, pp. 26–51).

The first reliable accounts of the Nambicuara date from 1907 to 1912, the period when General Rondon was putting up the telegraph line between Cuiabá and Porto Velho. In 1912, Roquette-Pinto visited the Nambicuara and the Paressí, and later published the results of his investigations in his book entitled "Rondonia." This book undoubtedly is the first anthropologically compe-
648 tent report about the Nambicuara. After 1910, small Government Indian Posts were established, one at Tolosa on the upper Cravarí River, a short distance east of Utiarity, and another called Pyrineus de Sousa between Campos Novos and

4: Oberg E-5 (1949) 1953
SP17 Nambicuara SP17
Brazilian Indians SL4

In 1949, Kaero Onaga, under the supervision of Dr. Oberg, measured 22 Umotina (14 males, 8 females), 13 Eastern Nambicuara (7 males, 6 females) of the Wakitisu band, and 5 Iranxe males. The Umotina were measured at Barra dos Bugres, the Nambicuara and Iranxe at Utiarity. Small as these series are, they represent relatively large samples of the groups from which they are drawn. The total Umotina population is about 65, with 34 adults (see p. 106); the Wakitisu band numbers only 18, and the Eastern Nambicuara together total only about 130 (see p. 86). No figures on the Iranxe are available but they are definitely a remnant group.

The drastic reduction of even the most secluded aboriginal populations in Brazil enhances the value of physical studies already made on them. The present contribution to the physical anthropology of northern Mato Grosso may be added to the earlier studies by Ehrenreich (1897), Ranke (1910), and Roquette-Pinto (1935). In addition, the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro has unpublished physical data on some of the Upper Xingú tribes, particularly the Camayurá. Vellard (see Imbelloni, 1948, p. 237, ftn.) has unpublished information on three Nambicuara bands. Willems (personal communication) is in the possession of measurements on 40 male Tápirapé. A careful analysis of all these studies should go far in rounding out the physical anthropology of northern Mato Grosso. In the meantime, I have endeavored to fit the Umotina, Nambicuara, and Iranxe series into the existing knowledge of the area.

[p. 128 (B)]

141 Brazilian Indians are brachyskelic, and the Nambicuara con-
144 stitute no exception [to this rule].

[214] In terms of their cephalic index, the Serra do Norte Indians must be placed alongside the Paressi on Ehrenreich's chart (76).

Their nasal index (85), which approaches platyrrhinism, places them far from the Cayapo and from the Indians of the Ge group, who according to Ehrenreich have the narrowest noses.

Their facial index (74.6) places them close to the Bororo (75.9) and far from the Paressi (81.5) and other Arawakan Indians.

This somatic description of the Serra do Norte Indians shows to some extent that their characteristically American physical substratum of the Mongoloid type has been subjected to numerous influences leading to the present lack of homogeneity.

Various crosses must have modified the original Nambicuara type. From the standpoint of physical anthropology, I believe, their type is very similar to that of the Indians who speak Nu-Arawakan dialects. It is a type modified by alien blood and possibly by Negro blood.

[Plates page 198.]

[215]

Chapter IX

Ethnography and Linguistics

131 The Indians scattered through the valley of the Juruena and through the Serra do Norte inhabit territories bathed by Amazonian waters.

101 They are called Nambicuara (Nyambiquara, Mambyuara, Mambyara, Membyuara, etc.) by the frontiersmen and by the neighboring civilized Indians.

161 They number a few thousand. We do not know how many, and any estimate would be worthless. Since we either visited or learned with certainty of some twelve villages, we may reach a total of 1,200 if we grant each village an average of 100 inhabitants.

2: Steinen--656 F,D-5 (1884, 1887-1888) 1894 SP7 Bacairi SP7
Bororo SP8
Nambicuara SP17
Paressi SP19

/548 cont./

	1848		1872
14 Bororós Cabaçaes	110	Registo do Jaurú and Campos da Caiçara	40
15 Cayapós	200	Between sources of the S. Lourenço and the Taquary, between Paraná and Paranahiba	400
16 Coroados	?	Source region of the S. Lourenço	?
/549/			
17 Bacahirís	200	Source region of Paranatinga	200
18 Cajabís	?	Source region of Paranatinga	?
19 Barbados	400	Paraguay to the right and Serra dos Parecíz	400
20 Pariciz	250	Campos and Serra dos	250
21 Maimbarés	400	Parecíz	400
22 Cabixís	500		500
23 Nambiquarás	600	Rio do Peixe (to the Arinos)	600
24 Tapanhunas	800	Ribeirão (brook) dos Tapanhunas (to the Arinos)	800
25 Apiacaz	2700	Arinos and Juruena	2700
26 Mequens	?	East of the Guaporé	?
27 Guarayos	?	West of the Guaporé	?
28 Cautarios	?	Both banks of the Mamoré and Madeira	?
29 Pacáz	?	Eastern bank of the Mamoré	?
30 Cenabós	?	Western bank of the Mamoré	?
31 Jacarés	?		
32 Caripunas	1000	Bank of the Mamoré and Madeira	1000
33 Aráras	?	Bank of Madeira up to the Jamari (1)	?
	13020		8670

1. Empties into the Madeira 14 leagues below the cataract of Santo Antonio.